

Cowen Institute Poll Brief:

A Deeper Look at New Orleans Parents' Opinions on Public K-12 Education

March 2022

Cowen Institute
TULANE UNIVERSITY

Introduction

Since 2007, the Cowen Institute has conducted annual polls on perceptions of public education in New Orleans. These polls have served to provide insight on how parents, guardians, and the general public feel about the most relevant issues related to New Orleans' highly decentralized K-12 public education system. In previous editions of the poll, we have presented all of the findings for a given year in a single comprehensive report. However, this year, to expedite the release of the most timely findings, we released a series of briefs covering different topic areas covered by the polling.

This is the *third and final brief in that series* and examines parents and guardians' overall feelings about the quality and features of K-12 public education in New Orleans. To capture the experiences and attitudes of a wide range of parents, as we did in 2020, we polled 1,000 public and private school parents and guardians in Orleans Parish, as well as those who homeschool their children. This year, the breakdown of respondents was as follows:

- 83% were parents and guardians whose children only attend New Orleans Public Schools (NOLA-PS)
- 13% were parents and guardians whose children only attend private and parochial schools
- 3% were parents and guardians who have some children who attend public schools and some who attend private schools
- 1% were parents and guardians whose children are exclusively homeschooled

This final brief in our 2021-2022 series provides insights into how those parents and guardians feel about a range of topics related to New Orleans' K-12 public education, including standardized testing, One App, communications, unions, school closures, and transportation.

Methodology

This is the 12th opinion poll on public education in New Orleans published by the Cowen Institute and **was conducted between October 4-15th, 2021**. The survey items were developed by the Cowen Institute in consultation with LJR Custom Strategies, a strategic research and consulting firm led by Principal Jennifer Johnson. The poll surveyed 1,000 adults who reside in Orleans Parish and are the parent/guardian/responsible party for one or more children who currently reside in their household and attend a K-12 school or are homeschooled. Of those adults surveyed, 85% were reached by cell phone and 15% were reached by landline. The sample was representative of the location of residence of the population of New Orleans. Findings from the full sample are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus 3.1%. Subgroup analyses are subject to error of up to plus or minus 10%.

A full overview of question format and item-level descriptives are included on our website [cowendata.org](https://www.cowendata.org).

Key Findings

This year's poll offers evidence of the notable differences in accessing education opportunities and information faced by parents and guardians of divergent socioeconomic backgrounds. Across many topics covered in this brief, respondents from lower-income households had notably different responses and experiences than respondents from higher-income households. This provides insight into the equity challenges still confronting NOLA-PS and educators.

Standardized Testing

- **The majority of parents (56%) support using standardized testing as one measure of school and student performance.**
 - 75% of college graduates, and 83% of respondents from higher-income households supported standardized testing, compared to 42% of respondents with a high school degree or less, and 47% of those making \$40,000 or less annually.
 - Opponents of standardized testing as a measure of performance were asked to volunteer their reason for opposition and their reasoning generally focused on the fact that not all kids test well and that standardized tests can be unfair.

One App

- **As in previous polls, many respondents continue to find the One App challenging. From usability issues to dissatisfaction with the selection process, respondents shared a range of concerns. Higher income parents were more likely to base their school selection on quality, while respondents from lower income households are more likely to take location and transportation into account.**
- **After an uptick in positive ratings last year, feelings toward One App have dropped back to levels near where they were in 2019. This year, 24% of NOLA-PS parents offered a positive assessment of One App, while another 24% offered a negative one. A substantial 47% were neutral.**
 - In 2020, 41% were positive and 18% were negative. In 2019, 19% were positive and 25% were negative.
 - Respondents from households who earned \$40,000 a year or less had much higher neutral feelings towards One App than higher educated and higher income respondents, but were also more likely to be dissatisfied with their One App results.
 - Respondents with high school students were more negative toward One App than parents of K-8 students.
 - White NOPS parents were more positive toward One App than NOLA-PS parents of Color.
 - Notably, 31% of parents said they either didn't know or refused to answer when asked if they were happy with their child(ren)'s One App result, which could indicate a continued need for greater public understanding of the application system.
- **Academic performance was the main consideration respondents cited when asked what was most important when selecting schools within One App.**
 - 52% of respondents said they based their decision on the school's academic performance, compared to 31% who answered teachers, 15% who cited the school's letter grade, and 9% who said the school's reputation.
 - Higher income parents placed far more importance on the school's letter grade and far less importance on teachers than parents from other socioeconomic backgrounds.
- **Differences emerged among socioeconomic lines with regards to what factors guardians considered when filling out the One App.**
 - Location and transportation options were less important to respondents from higher income households than they were to those from lower income households, which suggests that families from lower income households face additional logistical barriers when considering whether to apply to schools outside of their home neighborhood.
 - Respondents of Color were likely to use the bus for transportation to school far more than White respondents.
- **When asked to express their major concerns with One App, respondents focused on the selection process, not getting into their desired school, and the usability of the app.**

Communications

- **Emails from the school and communication with classroom teachers are the main way NOLA-PS guardians find information related to the specific schools their children attend. Comparatively, when it came to receiving news about NOLA-PS, respondents cited other parents, the NOLA-PS website, and teachers as the main information sources.**
 - There were no notable differences along racial lines; however, respondents from lower income households were far more likely to receive information about their schools from teachers, compared to respondents from higher-income households who were more likely to cite emails from the school as their top information source.
 - Respondents are less likely to cite teachers as a source of information about NOLA-PS now compared with 2020, from 53% then to 27% now.
 - Social media is a source of information about NOLA-PS for 24% of NOLA-PS parents, up from 8% in 2020.
- **55% of respondents from non-public schools indicate they get their information from emails from the schools, while only 17% get information from teachers.**

Unions

- **Unions do not seem to be a major concern for parents.**
 - 69% of respondents do not know if teachers at their child(ren)'s schools are unionized.
 - 41% of respondents supported teachers unionizing, while 40% didn't know or refused to answer and 19% opposed unionization.
 - Support for unionization was highest among respondents from higher income households and lowest amongst those from lower income households. White respondents also supported unionization at higher rates than Black respondents (47% to 37%, respectively).

School Closures and Under Performing Schools

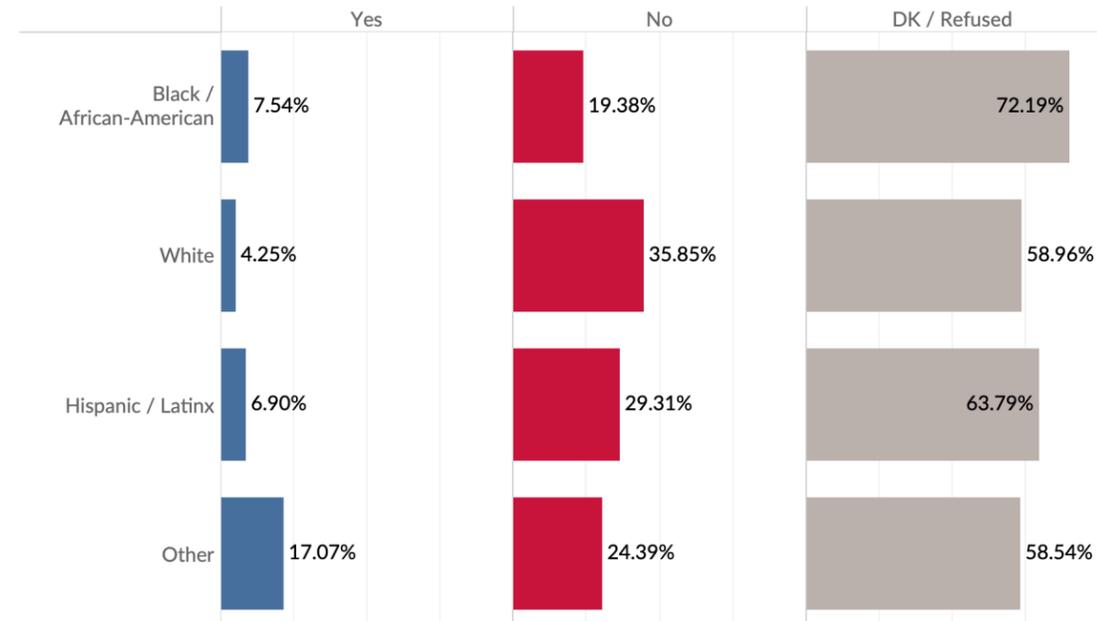
- **Parents do not support closing lower-performing schools.**
 - 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that low-performing schools should not be closed until enough time has passed after the pandemic to see if their performance improved.
 - Respondents indicate that closing an underperforming school should be a last resort, as only 4% said that was the best response to handle a school that has been consistently underperforming either academically or financially. Notably, that low level of support for school closures was consistent across all races.
 - 26% wanted NOLA-PS to provide underperforming schools with additional resources, 24% supported turning the school over to another operator, and 23% wanted NOLA-PS to implement a change in school leadership.
 - Respondents who also rated NOLA-PS schools with an A/B grade were more in favor of changing the operator or leadership than those giving schools a lower grade. Those who gave the schools a C grade or lower preferred to offer the school additional resources and support.
 - Only 12% of respondents think the district should take over an underperforming school.

Transportation

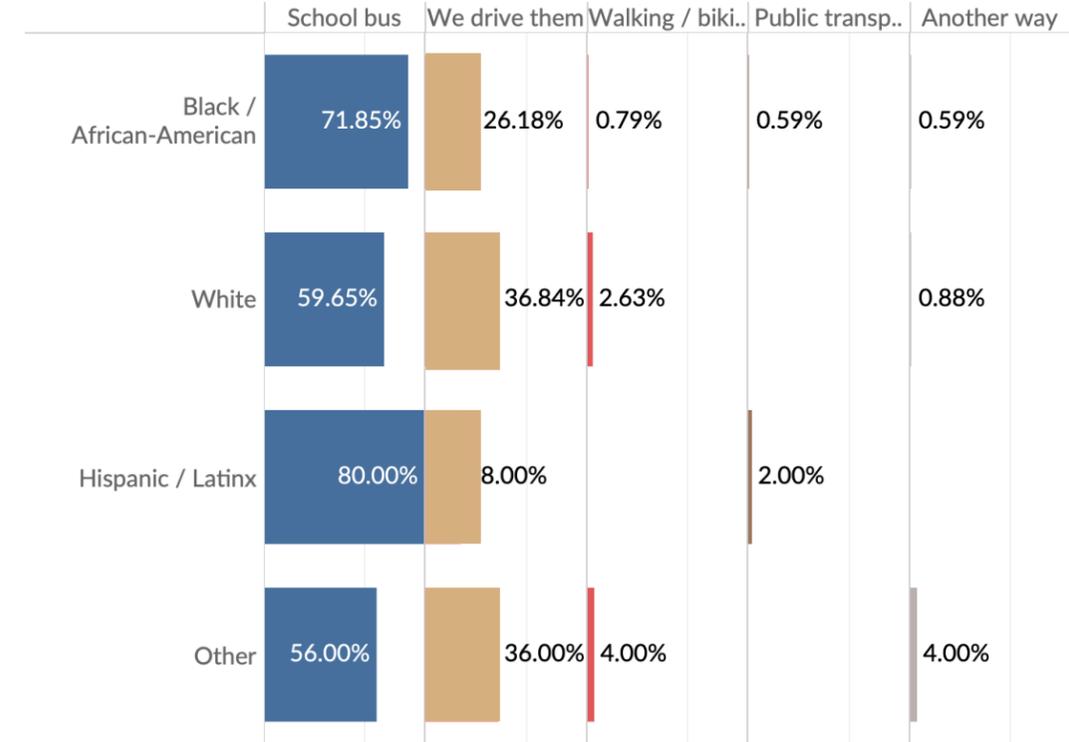
- **The majority of NOLA-PS families are reliant on school bus transportation to get their child(ren) to and from school on a daily basis.**
 - 68% of NOLA-PS respondents reported that at least one of their children rode the school bus to school most days. 47% said they drive a child to school most days.
 - Respondents from household incomes that were less than \$40,000 a year were the most likely to have a child who rode the bus, while respondents who made \$75,000 or more were the most likely to drive their children to school.
 - Additionally, families with students in Kindergarten through 8th grade were far more likely to use bus transportation than families with students in 9th-12th grades.

Responses by Race

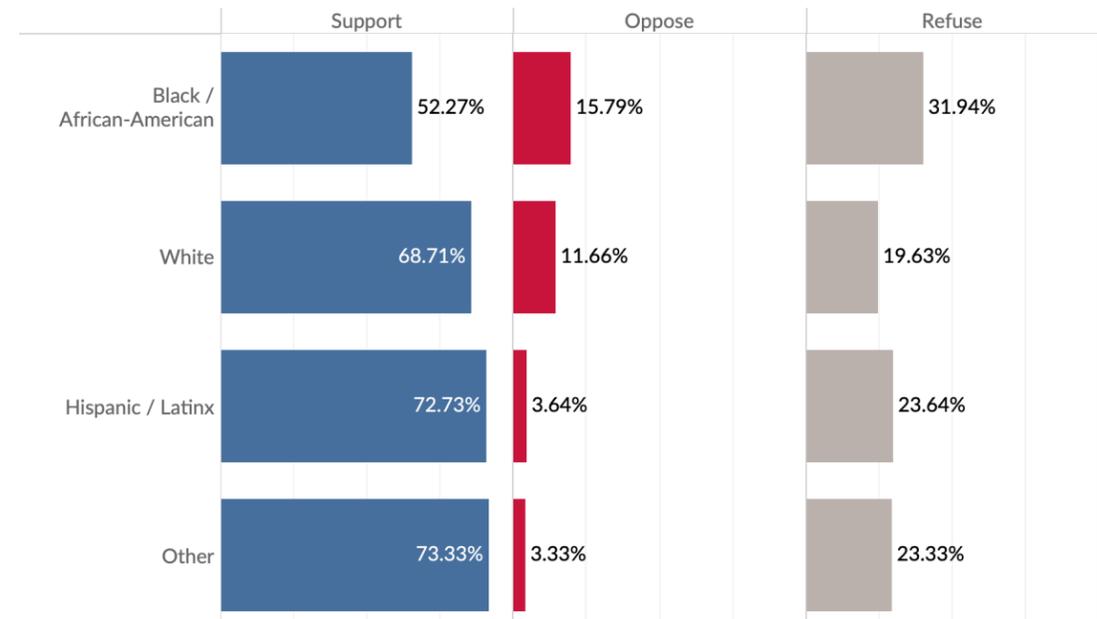
Are the teachers at your (child)ren's school unionized?



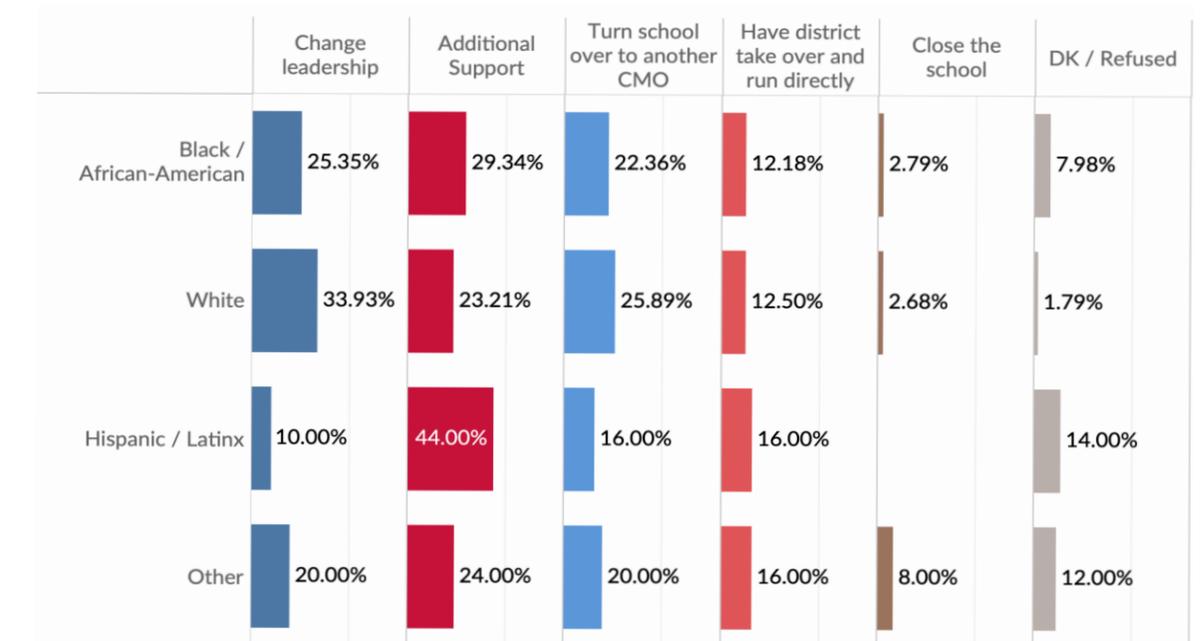
How do you get your child(ren) to school? (Multiple responses allowed, results presented for first response only)



Do you support standardized testing as a measure of school success?

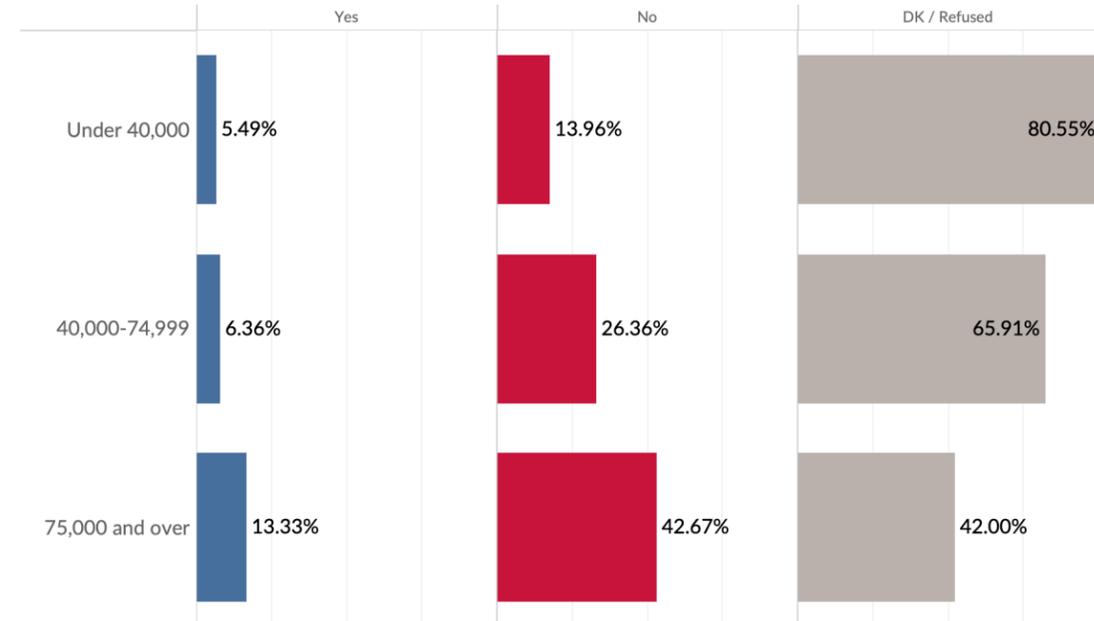


If a New Orleans public school has been consistently underperforming academically or financially and is not meeting NOLA-Public Schools' standards, which one of the following do you think NOLA-Public Schools should do to respond?

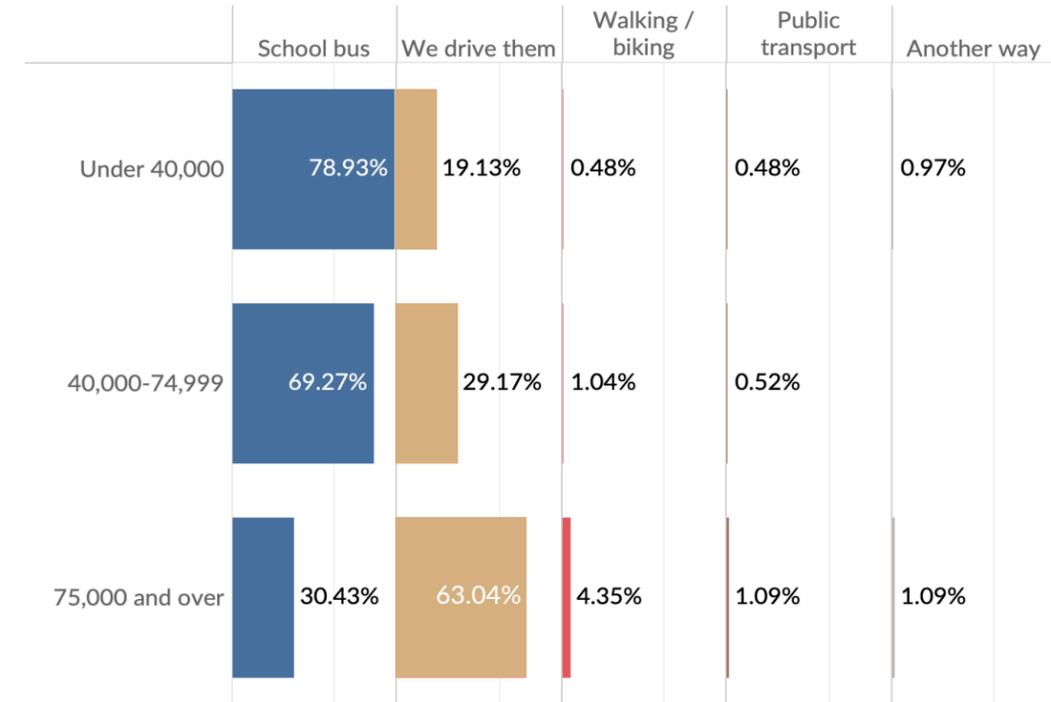


Responses by Income

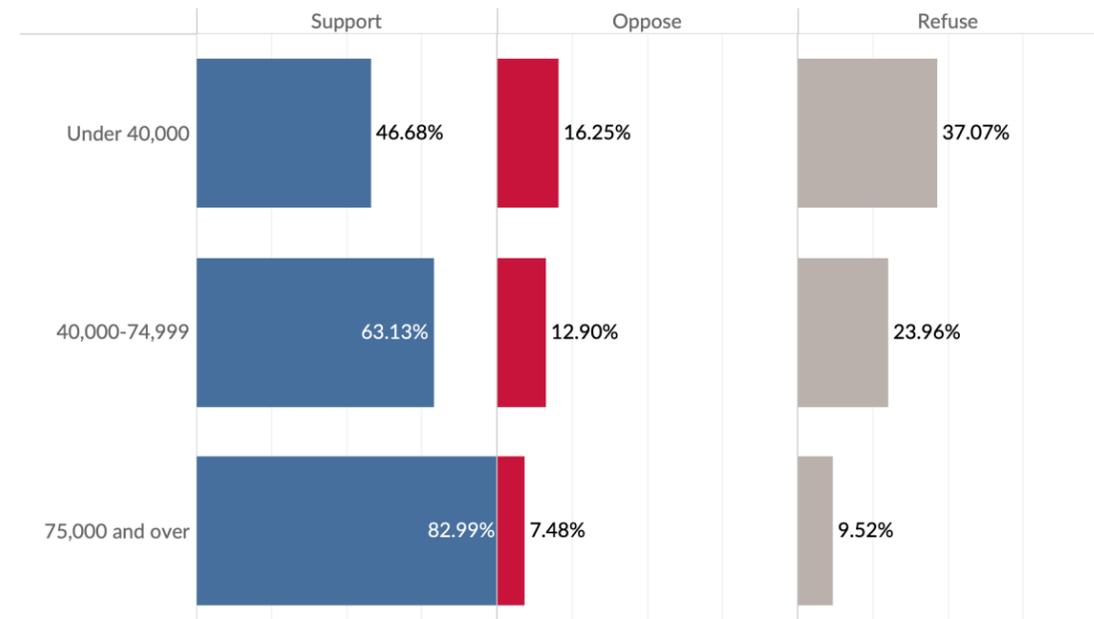
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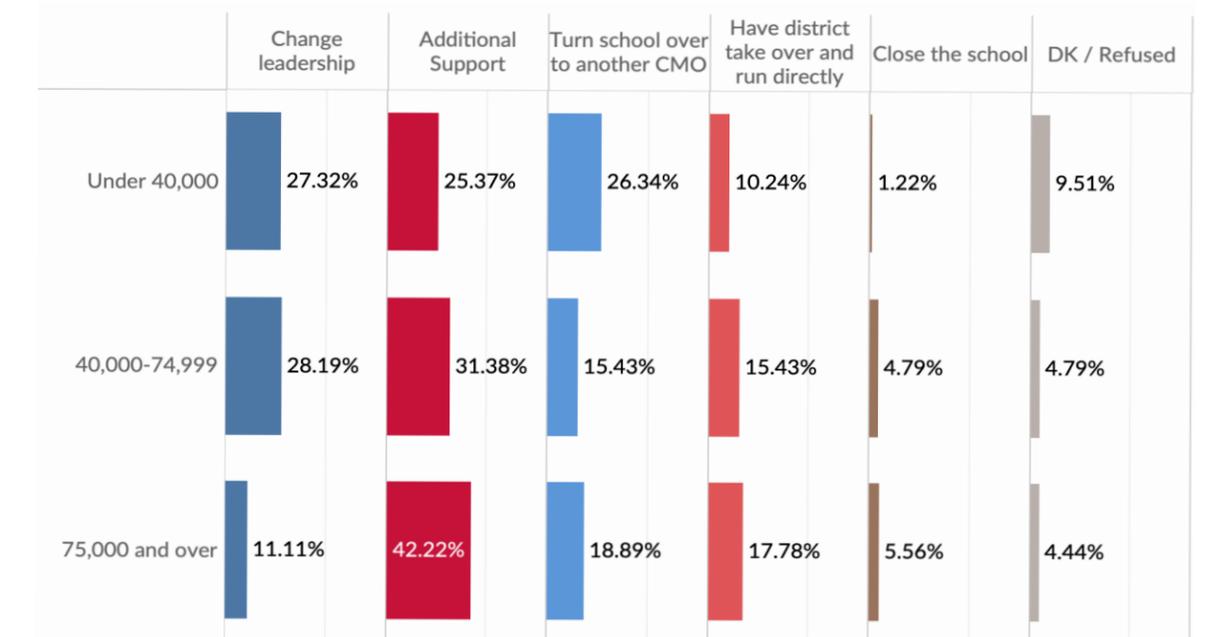
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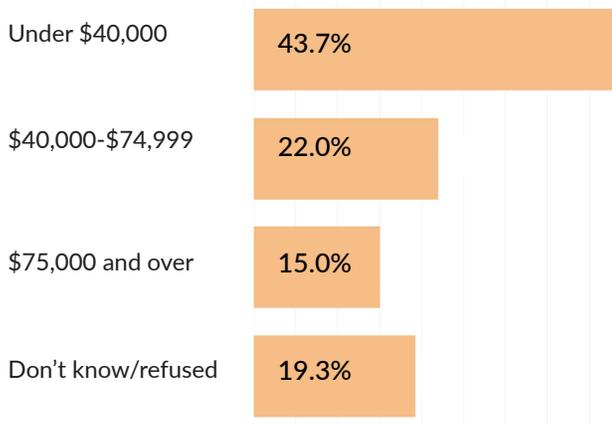


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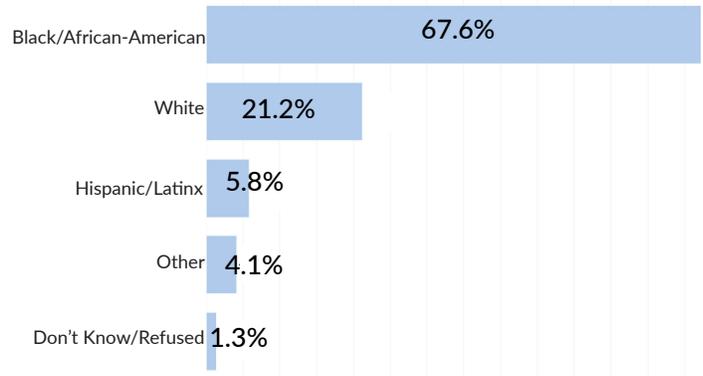


Sample Demographics (1,000 Total Respondents)

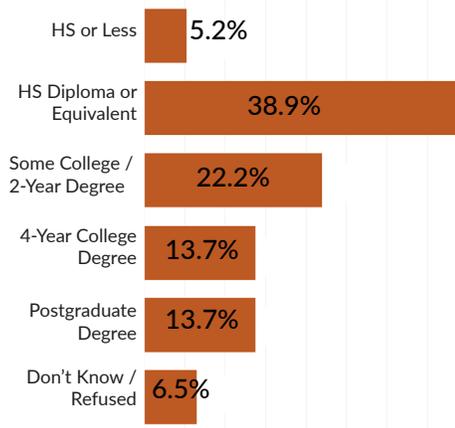
Household Income



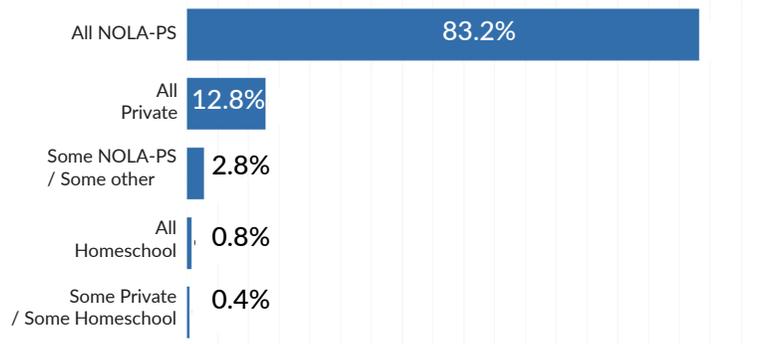
Race



Education Level



Type of School Child is Enrolled In



Gender

